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Kennedy's New Diplomacy in Cuba

By JAMES RESTON

WASHINGTON, Oct. 24—The new Kennedy style of diplomacy is now operating in the Cuban crisis. It is highly personal and national. It is power diplomacy in the old classic European sense that prevailed before the great men worried much about consulting with allies or parliaments or international organizations.

The President did not assemble the National Security Council or the Cabinet into formal session to debate the selective blockade of Cuba. He discussed it personally with some members of his Cabinet and staff, made up his mind, and then called them into formal session to tell them what he had decided to do.

He did not follow the normal diplomatic practice of giving his antagonist a quiet escape from fighting or withdrawing, but let the Soviet Foreign Minister leave the White House without a hint of what was coming and then announced the blockade on the television.

Similarly, he called in the Congressional leaders two hours before the announcement and told them what he was going to announce. When he asked for their opinions, Senator Richard Russell of Georgia, Chairman of the Armed Services Committee, spoke up and said he thought the President had chosen the course best designed to take the most time, annoy the most nations with the least effective results.

Kill Don't Wound

The Senator's view was that, under the circumstances, a quick invasion was best because it was the only way to achieve the President's main objective of dismantling the missiles already in Cuba. The President's answer, before he hurried off to prepare for his broadcast, was that it was easy to have such opinions when you didn't have the responsibility of acting—and in this case of killing Russians in the invasion.

Also, the President didn't really consult the Latin-American or North Atlantic allies; he informed them of his intention. The civilities were maintained: all were told ahead of time; all appropriate Ambassadors were relieved of the embarrassment of hearing the news on the television, but the decision preceded the "consultation."

There is a great deal to be said for this procedure. The President was confronted with a power play; he was being tested by Khrushchev in the most direct

way; and he responded with a power play; he answered the test in a way that would not have been possible had he consulted with the allies and the United Nations, and permitted his associates to allow the free press to operate in its usual way.

This brisk and sudden diplomacy, however, cannot be pursued without cost. The political reaction within the nation and the alliance has been gratifying to the Administration, but it is misleading because it is not the same as the private reaction.

Some Misgivings

Privately, there are several misgivings. First, many people find it hard to believe that the offensive Soviet missile sites in Cuba suddenly mushroomed over the weekend. Accordingly, there is considerable suspicion either that the official's intelligence was not as good as maintained, or the Administration withheld the facts.

Second, many diplomats within the alliance still think it was wrong to confront Khrushchev publicly with the choice of fighting or withdrawing, especially since the security of many other unconsulted nations was involved.

Finally, misinformation given to the press about the Soviet build-up has carried over into the present, leaving considerable doubt in the midst of the crisis about what is and is not true.

This, of course, is normal practice under almost any kind of diplomacy. The first casualty of every international crisis is truth. As official tension mounts, official accuracy declines and it becomes patriotic to mislead the enemy by evasion, distortion and outright falsehood.

Nevertheless, confidence within the nation and the alliance in the judgment and veracity of the Administration is still important, for the crisis is just beginning.

The Critical Pause

The President by his public move has achieved one part of his objective. He has rejected in dramatic fashion Khrushchev's effort to complete the offensive missile bases, but a considerable Communist base is still there, and this is the problem that the present blockade will not

Meanwhile, Khrushchev too has achieved one part of his objective. He now has half the world clamoring for negotiations on these missile bases and the chances are that he was always more interested in getting rid of our bases in Turkey and Berlin than in establishing one in Cuba, which he didn't need in order to attack the United States.

Thus, it is not yet proved that the President's new diplomacy and strategy will achieve their objective. He has been bold enough to defy Khrushchev—which detailed allied diplomacy would probably never have permitted him to do—but the missiles remain in Cuba, and the chess players in Moscow now have